



PAINT **WOOD** **ON**

**Decorated
American
Furniture
Since the
17th Century**

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on
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LLOYD E. HERMAN



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LENDERS
TO
THE
EXHIBITION

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, Virginia
Joyce Aiken and Jean Ray Laury, Clovis, California
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland
Jeffrey and Jane Camp, Tappahannock, Virginia
Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois
The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia
Mr. and Mrs. Ridgley Worthington Cook, Illinois
Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts
Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Hagler, Ypsilanti, Michigan
Herbert W. Hemphill, New York, New York
The Hitchcock Museum, Riverton, Connecticut
Mrs. Donna Jacobs, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Ricki Kline, San Francisco, California
Paul Mathison, Los Angeles, California
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Gary Moody, Saint Paul, Minnesota
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico
Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York, New York
The Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa
The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois
Tommy Simpson, Dobbs Ferry, New York
John Stanley, Middleboro, Massachusetts
Mrs. Mitchel Taradash, Ardsley-on-Hudson, New York
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut
Mr. and Mrs. James Yannatos, Cambridge, Massachusetts

PAINT ON WOOD

Decorated American Furniture Since the 17th Century

Lloyd E. Herman, Director, Renwick Gallery of the National Collection of Fine Arts

A fondness for the decorated surface seems to have been with us always. Today vans roll down the highway brightly painted with tropical scenes and abstract patterns of color, and blue jeans are embroidered with designs that emulate ethnic or folk art traditions. Paint-decorated furniture would seem to have lagged far behind printed fabrics, patterned dinnerware, sheets, rugs, and wallpaper, which vie for attention in the contemporary home. True, what is readily identifiable as painted furniture is not often seen in interior design today, except in children's rooms. But if the surface of modern manufactured furniture is scratched, beneath the imitation "fruitwood" finish we find unmatched wood and plastic "carvings." It is painted, too.

In every period of this country's history there has been furniture with painted decoration that was consistent with the prevailing style, as well as less sophisticated pieces made in rural or otherwise isolated areas that respond less quickly to fashionable change. These latter are often thought of as folk furniture, just as we consider objects with certain distinctive decorative tech-

niques or ethnic and regional characteristics to be folk art.

This exhibition presents a sampling of the range of paint-decorated furniture produced for use during the last three centuries in the United States. Present-day collections include a great many more examples from the nineteenth century than from other periods. The smaller population of earlier periods required fewer objects; also, many early pieces, originally painted, were stripped to bare wood by collectors who did not appreciate their painted finish. During the twentieth century, little factory-produced furniture has been made with painted decoration, and there have been no identifiably new decorative techniques used by folk craftsmen in painting their furniture. Nonetheless, despite the fashionable taste for the clean-lined, unembellished object that grew from Bauhaus ideals of the 1920s and gained popular acceptance in the 1950s, contemporary artists and craftsmen are once again decorating the surfaces of their furniture with paint.

All attributions of dates, makers, and materials are those of the lenders. Dimensions are in inches, followed by centimeters in parentheses. Height precedes width and depth.

SOME EARLY EXAMPLES

The earliest furniture produced in colonial America was made in New England by artisans trained in diversified woodworking skills.¹ Following the traditions of their homeland, the English colonists made sturdy—sometimes massive—pieces, rectilinear in form, and often decorated with carving in low relief. No examples made before the middle of the seventeenth century have survived, but as Marshall B. Davidson has pointed out, established styles proved to be surprisingly persistent in the American colonies: “Styles changed

only slowly, and furniture, for example, continued to be made in the earlier manner for years after the century had closed.”²

Most of the early furniture produced in the colonies was painted or stained, and both carved and uncarved pieces were frequently decorated, as well, with boldly applied painted designs. The effect of this decoration is particularly striking when it is applied to large case pieces, such as the ones shown in catalog numbers 1 and 2.

The Hadley Chest

During the seventeenth century, Boston and New York, the two most important colonial centers, exerted a strong influence on furniture makers in surrounding areas. In the Connecticut River valley, however, a distinctive local style developed in the area around Hadley, Massachusetts. About 150 chests and boxes in the Hadley style, dating from 1670 to around 1730, are still extant. Many of the chests bear dates and initials and appear to have been made as dowry chests for young women. Dean Fales, in his book *American Painted Furniture 1660–1880*, describes the spirited style of the Hadley case pieces:

Extremely flat tulip and leaf carving are the hallmarks of these chests, with pinwheels and hearts occasionally used. The entire surface is usually treated with a scratch-carving technique with squiggly scrolls that give the surface a feeling of embroidery. Variations occur often in the decoration. . . .

Hadley chests were painted or stained when made, the colors unifying the incredibly worked-over details of their facades. . . . The “MM” chest [catalog number 1] is notable for its early paint. The stiles and rails are black, with the exception of the red rail below the red central panel. The top drawer is dark brown, and the lower drawer and two outside panels are lightly stained natural, as is much of the stippled background.³

The Kas

Another distinctive style of furniture was developed in the Hudson River valley, which had been settled by the Dutch a half-century before the British seized Nieuw Amsterdam in 1664. Although the styles favored by the English colonists were to prevail in the colony renamed New York by its new rulers, the Dutch tradition of painted furniture did not at once die out.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the

Dutch to painted furniture in America was the *kas*, the great cupboard of the colonial Dutch household. *Kasten* produced in the Hudson River valley were typically painted in tints of gray (*grisaille*) to imitate traditional carving. Fruit, flowers, and cherubs were popular subjects used for the adornment of these cupboards.



1

1.
Chest with Drawers 1675–1710
Hadley-Hatfield area, Massachusetts
oak
44½ x 44¾ x 17¾ (113 x 113.6 x 45)
Lent by Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts



2

2.
Kas (cupboard) 1690–1720
Found in Katsbann, New York
pine
60 x 43 (152.4 x 109.2)
Lent by Mrs. Mitchel Taradash, Ardsley-on-Hudson,
New York
*This kas is decorated with grisaille emulating carvings
of fruit and cherubs.*

AN EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY FASHION

During the eighteenth century, lighter and more graceful styles of furniture were introduced from abroad into the American colonies. By the second quarter of the century, the Queen Anne style, with its refined curves, had become established, and by 1750 the intricate scrolls of Thomas Chippendale had come into fashion.

During this period, a mode of decoration known as "japanning" also became fashionable in the colonies.⁴ Japanning had originated earlier in England in answer to the need for a substitute for costly oriental lacquerware. The English process was simplified in the American colonies; finely grained wood was used to eliminate the need for a gesso base, and paint was used instead

of opaque varnish for the ground. Like their English colleagues, skilled colonial japanners decorated with *chinoiseries*, which they raised on a gesso support. While the gesso was still tacky, it was dusted with powdered gold or less expensive substitutes. Finally, coats of clear varnish were applied to the surface of the whole.

The finest japanned work was produced in the Boston area (see catalog number 4), but the art was practiced throughout the colonies, by amateur as well as by professional.⁵ Sometimes, as in catalog number 5, painted pieces were produced that imitated the style of japanned work but were innocent of its techniques.



3

3.

Mirror 1735-45

area unknown

japanned pine

44 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 1 $\frac{3}{16}$ (112.7 x 61.1 x 3)

Lent by Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum,
Dearborn, Michigan

4.

High Chest circa 1740-60

Boston

japanned maple with white pine

84 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ (214.6 x 111.4 x 59.7)

Lent by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation,
Williamsburg, Virginia

5.

Pair of Window Cornices 1750-80

New York

white pine

7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ (20 x 130.2 x 10.8)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, New York; Gift of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 1946



4

THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL

Federal Style

In England and Western Europe, interest in classical forms in architecture and decoration was intensified in the middle of the eighteenth century by excavations of the buried Roman cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii. The Scottish architect Robert Adam was a leading exponent in England of a new "correct" classical style that gradually replaced the rococo exuberance in such works as those of Chippendale. In 1773, the first volume of *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam, Esquires* was issued in London—the first published manual to guide craftsmen in England and America in the production and design of everything from inkstands to sideboards. Broad popularity of the "Federal" style—the term used today to refer to Ameri-

can works designed according to fashionable classical modes during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century—was helped by the publication of George Hepplewhite's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide* in 1788, and Thomas Sheraton's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book*, in four parts, from 1791 to 1794. Both men owed a debt to Adam, but each created his own style. Hepplewhite's furniture is characterized by straight tapering legs, square in section, with serpentine lines and, on case pieces, by flaring bracket feet. His chairs have shield-shaped, heart-shaped, or oval backs and spade feet. Sheraton is known for seating furniture with square backs, tapering reeded legs, and projecting elements.

Traditional modes of decorating furniture did not fall into oblivion during this period. "Fancy" furniture adorned with ornamental painting was a part of Adam's revival of interest in the classical, and Hepplewhite's *Guide* recommended that furniture panels be painted with subjects taken from "Raphael, Italian engravings, and also from French works." Sheraton, in his *Cabinet Dictionary* (1803), devoted an entire section to the techniques and designs of painted furniture and this style is often called "fancy Sheraton" in honor of the designer who did so much to popularize it. By the end of the eighteenth century, the popularity of fancy furniture had spread to the United States and chairs in the style were available in many important centers in the new nation.



6.
Chair circa 1796
Philadelphia
maple

38½ x 21½ x 18½ (97.7 x 54.6 x 47)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
New York; Gift of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 1947

This chair is believed to have formed part of an order to John Stillé, Jr., and Company, Philadelphia, from John Derby for "6 Gold & green chairs" and "6 Gold



7

and black do." Based on a Hepplewhite design, it is painted black and is decorated with "Prince of Wales feathers" on the front.

During the early 1800s the London taste for fancy furniture swept the new nation. Furniture producers in Baltimore became noted for the variety of forms and quality of decoration they offered in this style, an example of which is illustrated in catalog number 7.

7.

Settee circa 1800–10

Attributed to Hugh and John Finlay, Baltimore
gilt and polychrome decoration over unidentified wood
33 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 50 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ (85.4 x 129 x 49.2)

Lent by The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore,
Maryland; Gift of Lydia Howard de Roth and
Nancy H. De Ford Venable and Museum Purchase

John and Hugh Finlay, brothers from Ireland, were among the best known of nearly fifty makers and painters of "fancy chairs" working in Baltimore after the turn of the century. According to an advertisement of 1805, they offered "CANE SEAT CHAIRS, SOFAS, RECESS and WINDOW SEATS of every description and all colors, gilt ornamented and varnished in a stile not equalled on the continent—with real Views, Fancy Landscapes, Flowers, Trophies of Music, War, Husbandry, Love &c. &c."

Of the "real Views" the Finlays advertised are the three Baltimore buildings decorating this settee, which is from a set of thirteen pieces. From left to right are Homewood, the bank building of Baltimore, and Mount Clare. Homewood and Mount Clare are still extant.

Innovative contributions to the art of fancy furniture design and production were not confined to Baltimore. In Boston, for example, Samuel Gragg offered bentwood furniture designs that preceded by some years those of Michael Thonet of Austria. Gragg's chair and settee designs relied on beechwood, bent by steam to form stiles, seat frames, and legs in one continuous, curving piece.



8

8.

Chair circa 1815

Made and patented by Samuel Gragg, Boston
ash and hickory

34 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{5}{16}$ x 25 (86.6 x 45.5 x 63.5)

Lent by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts

Samuel Gragg was granted a patent on August 31, 1808, for an "elastic chair," which recreated the flowing lines of Grecian designs. An advertisement placed by Gragg in the Boston Columbian Centinel of May 10, 1809, gave public notice of his innovation:

Elegant Patent Chairs & Settees . . . Samuel Gragg, the Patentee, informs his friends and the public that he has now ready for sale, at his Shop in the Furniture Warehouse, building near the bottom of the Mall his Patent CHAIRS and SETTEES, with elastic backs and bottoms, made in a new, elegant and superior style, and of the best materials; those Chairs and Settees are very strong, light and airy and afford the most comfortable and agreeable seats for drawing-rooms, parlors, halls and other apartments. They can be furnished in sets of any number and of any degree of elegance in ornamental painting and gilding and at a very reasonable price. Gentlemen and Ladies who may want elegant and agreeable seats, are invited to call and satisfy themselves of their superiority—The patentee flatters himself that in their form and construction he has succeeded in combining fancy with convenience and strength, with elegance in a manner that will equal the expectation and wishes of his numerous patrons and customers.

Bamboo fancy and common Chairs and Settees made in the most faithful manner, are constantly kept for sale as above.

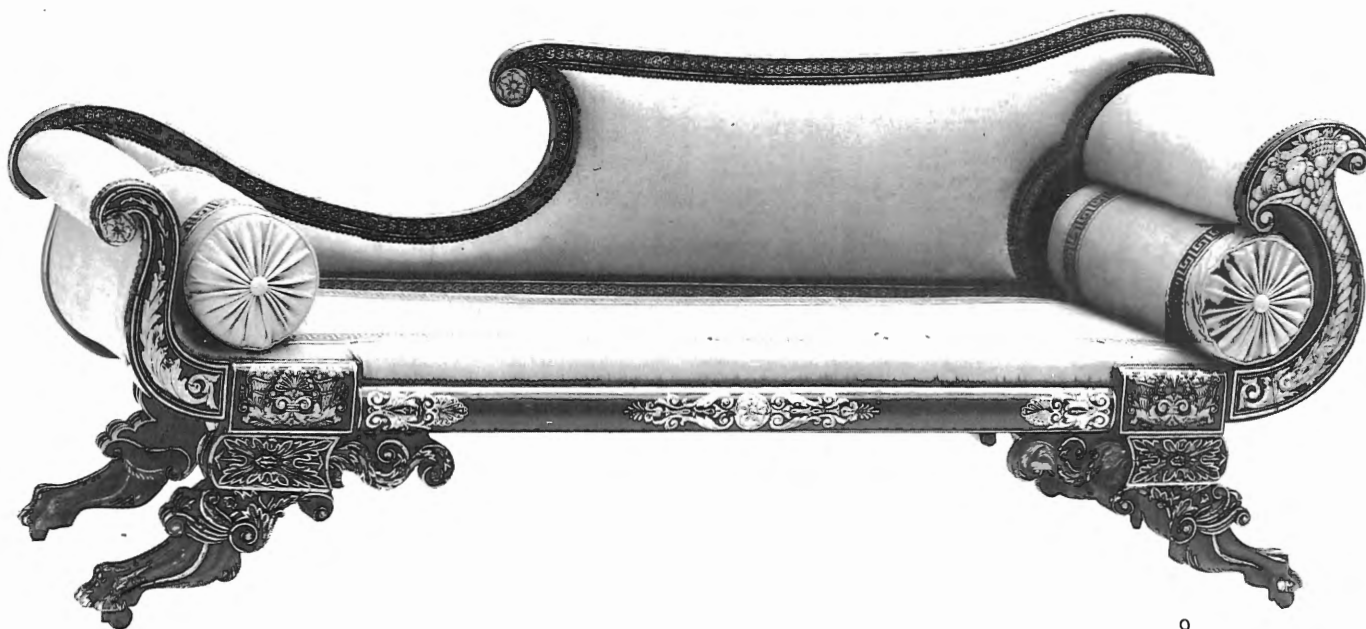
As he is wholly engaged in the manufacture of these articles of Furniture, it will be constantly his ambition by his fidelity and attention to deserve the patronage of a liberal and deserving public.

All orders in the line of his business will be punctually attended to and every favour gratefully acknowledged.

Empire Style

Succeeding the popular, graceful Federal styles was the more robust "Empire" fashion, which added elements of Egyptian design to the interpretations of Roman and Grecian archaeological finds. The inspiration for Federal styles was principally English, but the so-called Empire style took its cue from the French, stimulated by the new opulence under the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Even in England, the late works of Thomas Sheraton, as well as designs by Thomas Hope and George Smith, reflect French archaeological interests. French émigrés to America probably helped

to introduce their country's interpretation of the classical styles in American cities, and promoted the use of rosewood and decorations of ormolu (gilt bronze). The effect of ormolu was sometimes imitated in painted furniture by gilding on wood. Bronze powders, because they were less costly, often supplanted gold leaf for decorating furniture, and freehand decoration soon found competition from stenciled patterns. The washstand illustrated in catalog number 10 exemplifies the folk artist's interpretation of exotic rosewood and gilded decoration.



9

9.

Couch 1815-40

New York

ash, white pine, tulip, and cherry

33 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 78 x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ (84.1 x 188.1 x 39.3)

Lent by Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven,
Connecticut; The Mabel Brady Garvan Collection



10

10.

Washstand 1830-45

New Jersey

rosewood graining and stencil on pine

35¼ x 18⅝ x 18 (89.5 x 47.3 x 45.7)

Lent by Herbert W. Hemphill, New York, New York

STENCILING

The introduction of new steam-powered machinery into regions with readily available stores of wood to work brought spectacular advances in the production of furniture during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

The introduction of stenciling, a technique used to imitate ormolu and gilt decoration—so popular in American Empire styles—democratized the fancy chair. Although only one of approximately fifty makers of stenciled chairs, Lambert Hitchcock is often credited with introducing what we now call Hitchcock-type chairs because he marked more of his products than other makers. Lambert Hitchcock was a native of Cheshire, Connecticut, who settled in Barkhamsted, Connecticut, and established a cabinet and chair factory there in 1818, shipping his knockdown chairs to the South and Midwest for assembly. In 1826 he built a factory in the town—by then known as Hitchcocksville—and was soon making as many as 15,000 chairs a year in a variety of styles. In 1843 Hitchcock moved to Unionville, where he continued working until his death in 1852.⁶

Remarking on the wide availability of stenciled chairs, Marshall Davidson writes:

The mass-produced, painted Hitchcock chairs—a type then known to the trade as “fancy chairs,” and cherished by today’s collectors—sold for \$1.50 retail and were a stock in trade of many a wandering Yankee peddler. Chairs were peddled much farther from the factories than even that ingenious and imaginative salesman could reach. In a single day’s sailings from Baltimore in 1827 twelve thousand chairs of all descriptions were dispatched to points beyond the Horn.⁷

Bronze powders, in a variety of colors, were more commonly used for stenciling than those of more precious metals. They were applied through a paper stencil with a small leather or plush pad. The most frequent use made of the procedure on chairs is discussed by Florence E. Wright in *The Ornamented Chair*:

Although the first stencilling was done on dark, rich woods such as mahogany or rosewood—especially pianos, wardrobes, tables, bureaus, mirrors—we find that on chairs it was used most often to adorn a grained effect that had been created by painting the common wood to resemble a rarer and more expensive type. Early chairs were often brown, with the

graining pattern put on first with black, then covered with a brown varnish. Through the years, the most common background treatment was the black-over-red grained effect obtained by wiping some type of graining tool through a thin coat of black paint over a coat of Venetian red.⁸



11

11.

Chair circa 1825–32

Made and warranted by The Hitchcock Chair Company,
Hitchcocksville, Connecticut

stenciled maple and birch

34½ x 17¼ x 15½ (87.6 x 43.8 x 39.4)

Lent by The Hitchcock Museum,
Riverton, Connecticut

12.

Tall Clock circa 1835

Made by Riley Whiting, Winchester, Connecticut,
and painted by Robert Cole
grained and stenciled mahogany
79 x 17½ x 11 (200.5 x 44.4 x 27.9)

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ridgley Worthington Cook,
Illinois

13.

Mirror circa 1835

Probably Massachusetts
oil paint and stencil on pine
27⅞ x 14½ x ¾ (69 x 36.9 x 2)

Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

14.

Box circa 1838

Probably New England
oil paint and stencil on pine
5¼ x 10⅝₁₆ x 6⅞₁₆ (13.3 x 26.2 x 16.1)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

15.

Box circa 1838

Probably New England
oil paint and stencil on pine
4⅞ x 8⅜ x 5⅞ (10.5 x 21.2 x 15)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

The letters "CS" are stenciled on the front of the box.

ETHNIC VARIATIONS

Although the English and, to a lesser degree, the French styles are most apparent in early American furniture, styles originating in other parts of Europe—including Spain, Germany, and Scandinavia—were continued to some extent.

Santa Fe was the capital of a widespread Spanish colony as early as 1610. Even though the impact of the Spanish empire had begun to decline in the late eight-

eenth century, traces survived in the arts and found some expression in painted decoration.

German settlers arrived in Pennsylvania shortly after its founding as a colony, and by 1770 comprised nearly one-third of its population. With them they brought their traditions of visual expression, often associated with religion. Of their iconography, Fales writes:



17

Symbols were rife. The unicorn was the symbol of purity, and the peacock signified resurrection. Fish, living in water, were linked with baptism, while griffins and pelicans represented Christ. All sorts of flowers, animals, and birds had their special connotations. However, it must be borne in mind that decorative symbols can rapidly lose their meanings and become stylized. Thus, the true meaning of the tulip was sometimes little more than a love for the new plant; and six-pointed stars had long since become conventional motifs, before masquerading as hex signs on later barns.⁹

16.

Chest late 18th or early 19th century
New Mexico

tempera on gesso on pine
29½ x 66 x 18½ (75 x 168 x 47)

Lent by Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Division: Museum of International Folk Art

17.

Chest circa 1780
Berks County type, Pennsylvania
yellow pine and poplar
28⅝ x 52⅓ x 23 (72.5 x 135.3 x 58.4)
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, New York; Rogers Fund, 1923

Among the Scandinavian settlers who brought their decorative techniques and motifs to America, the Norwegians continued the practice of *rosemaling* (decorative painting combining scrolls and flowers). Each district in Norway developed distinctive styles that were used not only on furniture, but on sleighs, picnic baskets, chests, and trunks as well.

18.

Cupboard 1870
Norwegian-American type,
- found in De Forest, Wisconsin
pine
72½ x 59⅛ x 21 (184.1 x 150.1 x 53.3)
Lent by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Inscribed "John Eriksen, Brithe Sjurs[?]/Datter Engesathe 1870."

19.

Flour Bin 1871
Norwegian-American type, Winneshiek County, Iowa
rosemaling on pine
21 x 20¾ x 10 (53.3 x 27.3 x 25.4)
Lent by The Norwegian-American Museum,
Decorah, Iowa; Luther College Collection
Inscribed "IHM" (for Ingrid Helgesdatter Myran).



18

FOLIAGE AND FIGURES

Academies at which genteel young ladies received art training after 1800 flourished from Maine to Kentucky. In addition to stitchery and plain sewing and knitting, students at these "female schools" or seminaries learned to paint on paper and velvet, and, in New England, on cabinetmakers' boxes or tables. Scenes were often of mythological or religious subjects, foreign views taken from drawing books, or fruits and flowers. Use of natural forms or scenes for decoration was not confined to students of art academies, however. Artists without formal training in painting relied on familiar figurative elements—real or stylized—drawn from other art or from the imagination. Such floral or figurative decoration might be painted over a painted grained surface or used in combination with stenciling.



23

20.

Lift-Top Chest with Drawers 1720–60

New England

pine

41½ x 38 x 16½ (105.4 x 96.5 x 41.9)

Lent by Mrs. Mitchel Taradash,

Ardsley-on-Hudson, New York

21.

Trunk circa 1825

New Hampshire

pine

7⅞ x 20 x 9⅞ (20 x 50.8 x 25)

Lent by Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum,
Dearborn, Michigan

22.

Chair circa 1830

Possibly New York

unidentified wood with painted rush seat

32½ x 18⅞ x 19½ (82.5 x 48 x 49.5)

Lent by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection,
Williamsburg, Virginia

23.

Sewing Box circa 1830

New England

maple

4¾ x 12 x 9⅞ (12 x 30.5 x 23.8)

Lent by Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum,
Dearborn, Michigan

24.

Boston Rocker circa 1830–60

New England, possibly Boston area

painted and grained maple, pine; mahogany arms

42½ x 23¼ x 18 (107.9 x 59 x 45.7)

Lent by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts



GRAINED AND ABSTRACT DECORATIONS

Illusionistic interpretations in paint or grained and burlled surfaces, often simulating inlaid or paneled wood, are but one aspect of the artistry practiced by a craftsman and his graining tools. Often, graining combs made

of gutta-percha and cork were used to create boldly grained surfaces. Other decorative techniques included sponging, stamping, smoke-graining, feather-graining, and marbling.



26

25.

Stool circa 1830

Probably New England

painted floor design in oil on pine

$6\frac{7}{8} \times 13 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ (17.5 x 33 x 19)

Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

26.

Chest of Drawers circa 1825

Probably made by Thomas Matteson,

South Shaftsbury, Vermont

pine and maple

$40 \times 37\frac{1}{4} \times 20$ (101.6 x 94.6 x 50.8)

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ridgley Worthington Cook,
Illinois

27.

Tilt-Top Table circa 1750-55

New England

cherry with stippled decoration

$27\frac{1}{2} \times 32\frac{1}{2}$ (69.8 x 82.5)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
New York; Gift of Mrs. J. Insley Blair, 1945

28.

Dome-Top Box circa 1835

Maine type

pine, floral decoration

$7\frac{3}{8} \times 17\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ (18.7 x 44.4 x 22.2)

Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

29.

Box circa 1830

New England

pine

$9\frac{5}{8} \times 24 \times 12\frac{3}{4}$ (24.4 x 60.9 x 32.4)

Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois



30.
Dome-Top Box circa 1830
Probably New England
pine
 $14\frac{3}{8} \times 30\frac{3}{4} \times 16\frac{5}{16}$ (36.5 x 78.1 x 41.6)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

31.
Box circa 1835
Found in Maine
pine
 $12\frac{3}{8} \times 29\frac{9}{16} \times 13\frac{1}{16}$ (30.9 x 75.1 x 35)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois
The letters "BP" are on the front of the box.

32.
Box circa 1835
Found in Maine
pine
 $12\frac{1}{8} \times 29\frac{1}{16} \times 14$ (30.8 x 75.7 x 35.5)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

33.
Desk Box circa 1835
Found in Maine
smoked decoration on painted pine
 $6\frac{5}{8} \times 17\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ (16.7 x 45.4 x 22.2)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois

34.
Box circa 1838
Found in Maine
pine
 $11\frac{3}{4} \times 25 \times 13\frac{1}{8}$ (29.8 x 63.5 x 33.3)
Lent by Gail and Norbert Savage, Illinois
Inscribed "H. Johnson" on back.

FASHIONABLE FURNITURE

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the coexistence of a variety of furniture styles—revivals and eclectic interpretations of earlier fashions. Stylish furniture often utilized exotic woods, applied ormolu mounts, porcelain plaques, gold striping, and paint. The revived interest in Egyptian motifs is described by Fales:

The building of the Suez Canal in the late fifties was but one factor in the Egyptian craze of the sixties and seventies. . . . Ernest Hagen, a cabinetmaker working in New York at the time, criticized this "most awful gawdy style" with gilt-brass sphinx heads, gilt engraved lines, and painted-porcelain medallions. In a 1908 reminiscence of his contem-

poraries he said, "Other wise, their work was good; but the style horrible."¹⁰

Elements from other traditional styles also reappeared in new guises. In Hagen's eyes, for example, the stool described in catalog number 35 was in "Neo Grec." It was made by Alexander Roux about 1865 according to Fales, who adds, "[Roux] was one of the best of the New York furniture makers, whose work spanned the middle of the century from Gothic to classical Renaissance. This departure into painted decoration and the 'style antique' is a sprightly gem."¹¹ A somewhat later

example is the chair described in catalog number 36, which came from Chateau-sur-Mer, the fashionable Newport estate of Edith M. K. Wetmore and Maude A. K. Wetmore.

35.

Stool circa 1865

Made by Alexander Roux, New York

unidentified wood

height: 23¾ (60.3)

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
New York; Purchase, 1969, Edgar J. Kaufmann
Charitable Foundation



35



36

36.

Chair circa 1870-80

area unknown

unidentified wood, cane seat

32¼ x 16¼ x 14½ (81.9 x 41.2 x 36.8)

Lent by Philadelphia Museum of Art,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

MANUFACTURED FURNITURE

With the expansion of industrialization during the nineteenth century, a wide range of inexpensive machine-made furniture became increasingly plentiful. By the middle of the century, mass-produced furniture in matched sets was widely available to Americans of moderate means. To Fales, these sets represented painted furniture's "great moment in the Victorian period."

They consisted, he continued, of "decorated chests, beds, commodes, dressing tables, night stands, towel stands and chairs."¹²

In 1850 Alexander Jackson Downing recommended the use of cottage furniture in country homes, particularly that produced by the Boston firm of Edward Hennessey, which he praised for its "remarkable . . .



37.

Bureau circa 1850

Made by Hart, Ware and Company, Philadelphia
poplar with marble top

37 x 42 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ (93.9 x 108.5 x 51.4)

Lent by Philadelphia Museum of Art,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Celia Jackson Otto describes the set from which this bureau came as being "decorated with flowers painted on a black ground, framed in gilt scrolled ornament, a feature of the Louis Philippe style." She speculates that the set may be in the same style as an "enameled and richly ornamented cottage bedstead exhibited in 1853 at the New York Crystal Palace by Hart, Ware and Co."*¹⁵

38.

Washstand circa 1860–80

area unknown

painted and grained pine

29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ (74.9 x 73 x 40)

Lent by Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum,
Dearborn, Michigan

Cottage furniture was not the only result of the application of manufacturing techniques to the production of furniture. The Detroit Chair Factory, for

combination of lightness and strength," and for its attractive appearance and low cost:

It is very highly finished, and is usually painted drab, white, a delicate lilac, or a fine blue—the surface polished and hard, like enamel. Some of the better sets have groups of flowers or other designs painted upon them with artistic skill. When it is remembered that the whole set for a cottage bed-room may be had for the price of a single wardrobe in mahogany, it will be seen how comparatively cheap it is.¹³

By 1852, *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* was calling "particular attention" to the cottage furniture in "a most splendid display" by the firm of Hart, Ware and Company in Philadelphia, adding that cottage pieces were "now in general use."¹⁴

Cottage sets varied in decoration from the gold-scrolled, flowered style of the bureau described in catalog number 37, which was made by Hart, Ware and Company, to the plainer painted and grained washstand with its painted scrolls and stylized flowers, shown in catalog number 38.





example, specialized in the production of inexpensive seating pieces. This factory was in operation from 1865 through 1878, and ultimately produced 150,000 units a year. The chair described in catalog number 39, an example with painted graining, was no doubt produced to help fulfill the range offered by the factory: "From the common woodseated and canebottomed to the most costly and ornamented."

The high production rate of the factory had a significant consequence that has been discussed by Robert Bishop, museum editor, Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum. This consequence, Bishop writes, "was the destruction of rural and lower class decorative arts in the West. The dramatic decline in unit cost tended to make the labor of handcraftsmanship no longer feasible, even on a personal basis."

39.

Armchair circa 1865-78

Made by The Detroit Chair Factory
painted and grained unidentified wood

35 x 20¼ x 20⅝ (89 x 51.4 x 52.3)

Lent by Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum,
Dearborn, Michigan

By applying steam power to the manufacture of furniture, the Detroit Chair Factory provided an abundance of inexpensive furnishings for an expanding population.

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

The American manifestation of the arts and crafts movement, which had been initiated in England during the second half of the nineteenth century by William Morris, was clearly visible by the beginning of the twentieth century. The movement had started as a reaction against the shoddy craftsmanship and inappropriate ornamentation so evident in the bewildering array of manufactured objects brought into being by the rapid industrial expansion. At the turn of the century, the *Craftsman* magazine provided voice and

inspiration to designers and craftsmen in the United States, and coincided with the establishment of dozens of arts and crafts societies.

Arthur F. Mathews and his wife, Lucia K. Mathews, developed a variation that was peculiarly Californian on the rather geometric furniture styles associated with the arts and crafts movement. Arthur Mathews, who had studied art in Paris at the Académie Julian, returned to San Francisco in 1889 to join the faculty of the California School of Design. He was named director

in 1890, and in 1894 married Lucia Kleinhans, a student at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art (as the school was then called). By 1906 Mathews had expanded the art school's role to include magazine and book publication and a furniture shop.

Elegant custom interiors were created with products of the furniture shop set up by Mathews, such as wood paneling, murals, easel paintings with custom frames, furniture, specially designed fixtures, and other accessories. The enterprise has been described by Robert Judson Clark: "At the height of its popularity, the Furniture Shop employed from twenty to fifty craftsmen, with Mathews supervising the general designs and his wife looking after color schemes and the carving of details."¹⁶

The furniture decorations generally were painted low-relief carvings representing classical motifs and forms from nature—often with a distinctively Oriental ten-

dency. Of the latter, Harvey L. Jones wrote, "Among the many nature motifs in the frame and furniture designs were landscapes, plants, fruits and flowers common to California: coastal pine and cypress trees, peaches, plums, apricots, oranges and grapes, magnolia leaves and flowers, peonies and a virtual trademark, the California poppy."¹⁷

40.

Writing Desk circa 1915

Designed by Arthur F. and Lucia K. Mathews,

Furniture Shop, San Francisco

carved, incised, and painted mahogany

with scarab hardware of brass

30 x 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ (76.2 x 113.6 x 57.1)

Lent by The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California;

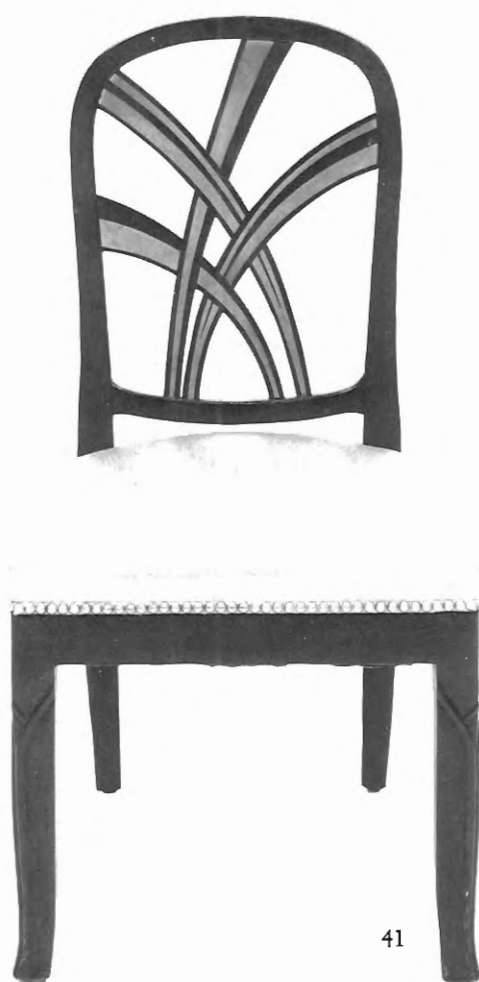
Gift of Concours d'Antiques, Art Guild,

The Oakland Museum Association



40

ART DECO



“Art deco” is a relatively recent term for what was once called “art moderne,” a style that eventually became fashionable during the 1930s. The term is derived from the title of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, held in 1925 in Paris, where the style was given its most lavish introduction. Although art moderne was to enjoy its greatest popularity in France, the United States was not without sophisticates who kept up with the latest international styles and could afford to indulge their fantasies. Quite probably, however, the style was most opulently seen in Hollywood’s films and in the architectural fantasies in which they were exhibited.

The chair described in catalog number 41 is attributed to architect Hal Pereira, whose expression of the modern style is related to his architectural and interior designs for movie theaters and residences. Pereira designed sets for motion pictures from 1950 to 1969, and received twenty-five Academy Award nominations and an Oscar for his design for *The Rose Tattoo*.

41.

Chair circa 1930

Attributed to Hal Pereira, Los Angeles

ebonized wood with pewter inlay

38 x 19½ x 18 (96.5 x 49.5 x 45.7)

Lent by Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois

This chair is part of a dining room ensemble designed for an apartment in Chicago.

SOPHISTICATED “PRIMITIVES” IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

During the 1930s and '40s, artists were much impressed by the artistic strength of nineteenth-century American folk art and expressions of traditional art in other na-

tions. Two men, each working separately on Cape Cod, expressed their fondness for folk art motifs by decorating pieces of furniture that others had cast off.



paint, wiped off to create an antiqued appearance. Hunt's reputation as a folk painter grew and his decorated furniture was soon available in Macy's Corner Shop and other stores. Glassware, fabrics, stationery, and clothing with his folk designs also attest to the popularity of his work. His influence on the creation of decorated furniture by others spread with the publication of *Peter Hunt's Workbook* (Chicago and New York: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1945) and *Peter Hunt's Do-It-Yourself Book* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1952).

42.

Cupboard late 19th century

Painted by Ralph Cahoon, Osterville, Massachusetts,
circa 1933

unidentified wood

62½ x 31½ x 20¼ (158.7 x 80 x 51.4)

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Charles V. Hagler,
Ypsilanti, Michigan

43.

Blanket Chest circa 1947

Painted by Peter Hunt, Provincetown, Massachusetts
unidentified wood

approximately 40 x 45 x 25 (101.5 x 114.3 x 63.5)

Anonymous lender

Ralph Cahoon, assisted by his wife, operated an antique shop in Osterville, Massachusetts. There the Cahoons sold trays, lamps, and furniture painted with designs recalling folk traditions and styles. Although the easel paintings for which Ralph Cahoon later became better known usually relied on mermaids, sailors, and other nautical motifs recalling whaling off the Cape, the cupboard shown in catalog number 42, which was one of the earliest pieces of furniture he painted, relies mostly on stylized floral decoration.

Artist Peter Hunt, who knew Cahoon, had a fine sense of humor that is apparent in his painted furniture decoration. Hunt (born Frederick L. Schnitzer) was a successful antique dealer in New York before he moved to Provincetown in 1919. As a hobby he began to decorate cast-off furniture with cheerful "peasant" designs, which generally relied on a few simple brushstrokes used in combination to represent hearts, peasants, angels, fish, and animals. He usually glazed the completed decoration with a thin coat of black or brown



CONTEMPORARY ARTIST- CRAFTSMEN

Works of art by contemporary makers of paint-decorated furniture reflect the diversity evident elsewhere in the visual arts of the 1960s and '70s. Surfaces are decorated not only with opaque paints but also with stains and dyes and even with automobile finishes, the metallic sheens of which create uniquely twentieth-century decorative effects.

Paul Mathison's dyed green cabinet with painted decoration (catalog number 44) preceded the "Mediterranean" style in furniture that derived from Spanish forms. It is inspired, in Mathison's words, "by California gardens and busy birds." Joyce Aiken and Jean Ray Laury (catalog number 51) collaborate on wood appliqué furniture and rely on color to emphasize the strength of cutout shapes. Alan Siegel's cubistic interpretation of a bowing Oriental (catalog number 46)

uses high-gloss finishes to emulate lacquer. Isabel O'Neil (catalog number 45) enlarges on the tradition of marbled and other *faux* finishes to create "mineral fantasies" unknown in nature. Kate Milner-Wright (catalog number 49) uses secondhand furniture, adding carved elements to create three-dimensional surfaces for representational paintings. Jeremy Samson (catalog number 47) uses transparent stained colors to emphasize the texture of laminated woods and the sculptural quality of his furniture. John Stanley's chest (catalog number 53) affords a massive surface for contemporary graphic treatment, and Tommy Simpson's fantasy clock (catalog number 52) combines sculptural carving with painting in such ways that, except for its functional clock face, it nearly loses its utilitarian function and becomes entirely sculptural.

44.

Cabinet 1963

Made by Paul Mathison, Los Angeles

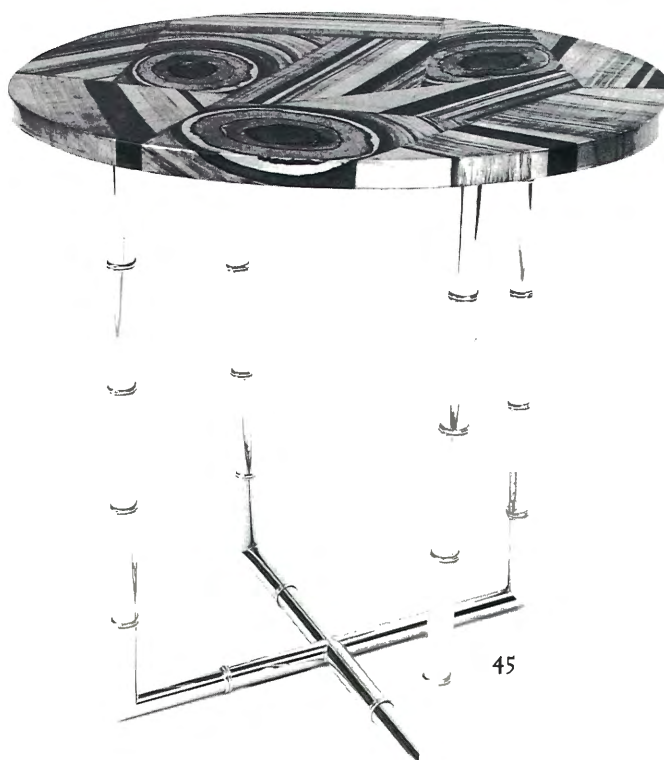
dyed and painted ash

29½ x 64 x 20 (73.6 x 162.5 x 50.8)

Lent by the artist



44



45.

Table 1966

Made by Isabel O'Neil, New York
painted and gilded birch with chrome base
20 x 19 x 15 (50.8 x 48.2 x 38.1)

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. James Yannatos,
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The artist uses the term "fantasy tiger's eye" for the effect produced by the paint and gilt on the table's top.

46.

"The Face Chair" 1967

Made by Alan Siegel, Woodstock, New York
enamel on laminated wood
32½ x 22 x 21 (82.5 x 55.9 x 53.3)

Lent by Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York, New York



47.

"Waterfall Table" 1973

Made by Jeremy K. Samson, Newbury, Ohio
stained plywood

12¾ x 14⅞ x 16⅞ (32.4 x 37.7 x 40.9)

Lent by Mrs. Donna Jacobs, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

48.

Chest 19th century

Painted by Patsy A. Billups, Virginia, 1974

poplar

23 x 44 x 17 (58.4 x 111.7 x 43.1)

Lent by Jeffrey and Jane Camp, Tappahannock, Virginia

49.

Music Cabinet 1974

Made by Kate Milner-Wright, Solon Springs, Wisconsin

unidentified wood

42 x 23 x 18 (106.6 x 58.4 x 45.7)

Lent by Gary Moody, Saint Paul, Minnesota

50.

Box 1975

Made by Ricki Kline, San Francisco

lacquered birch

3 x 7 x 13 (7.6 x 17.7 x 33)

Lent by the artist

51.

Headboard 1976

Made by Joyce Aiken and Jean Ray Laury,

Clovis, California

appliquéd and painted wood

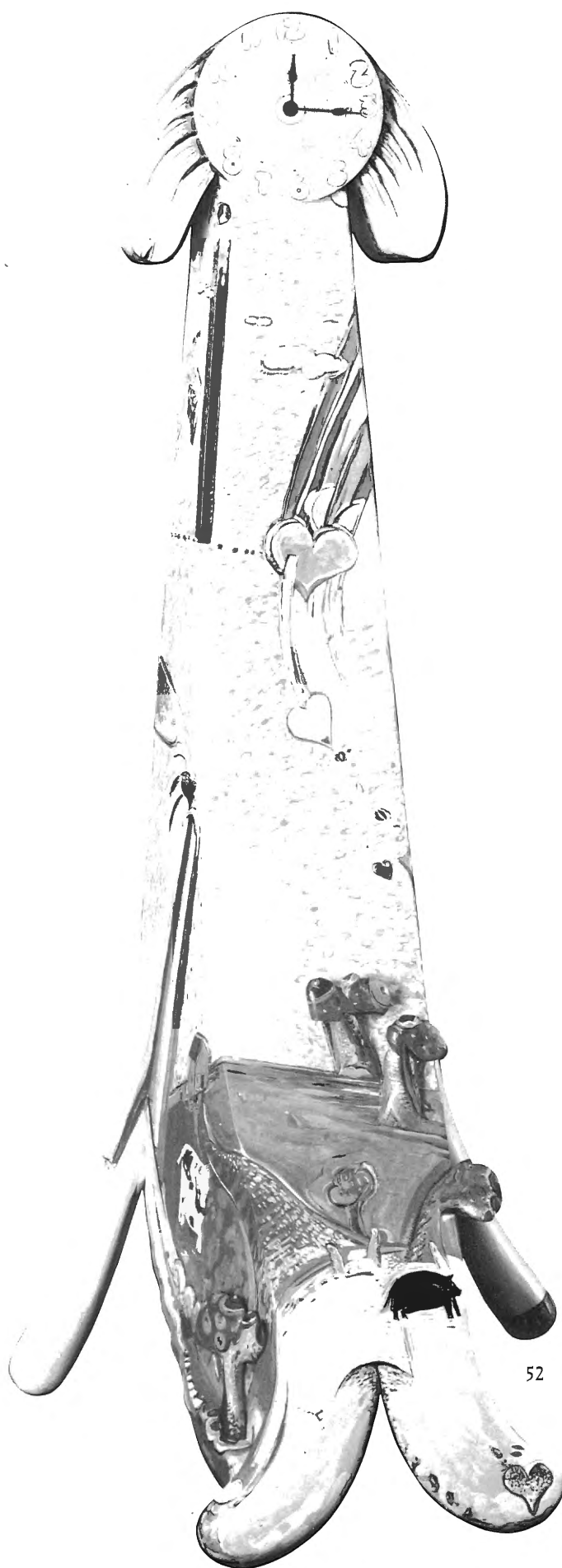
16½ x 40 x 3 (41.9 x 101.5 x 7.6)

Lent by the artists





49



52.

Clock 1976

Made by Tommy Simpson, Dobbs Ferry, New York

pine

78 x 33 x 25 (198.1 x 83.8 x 63.5)

Lent by the artist

53.

"Maple Mable" Chest 1976

© 1976 by John Stanley

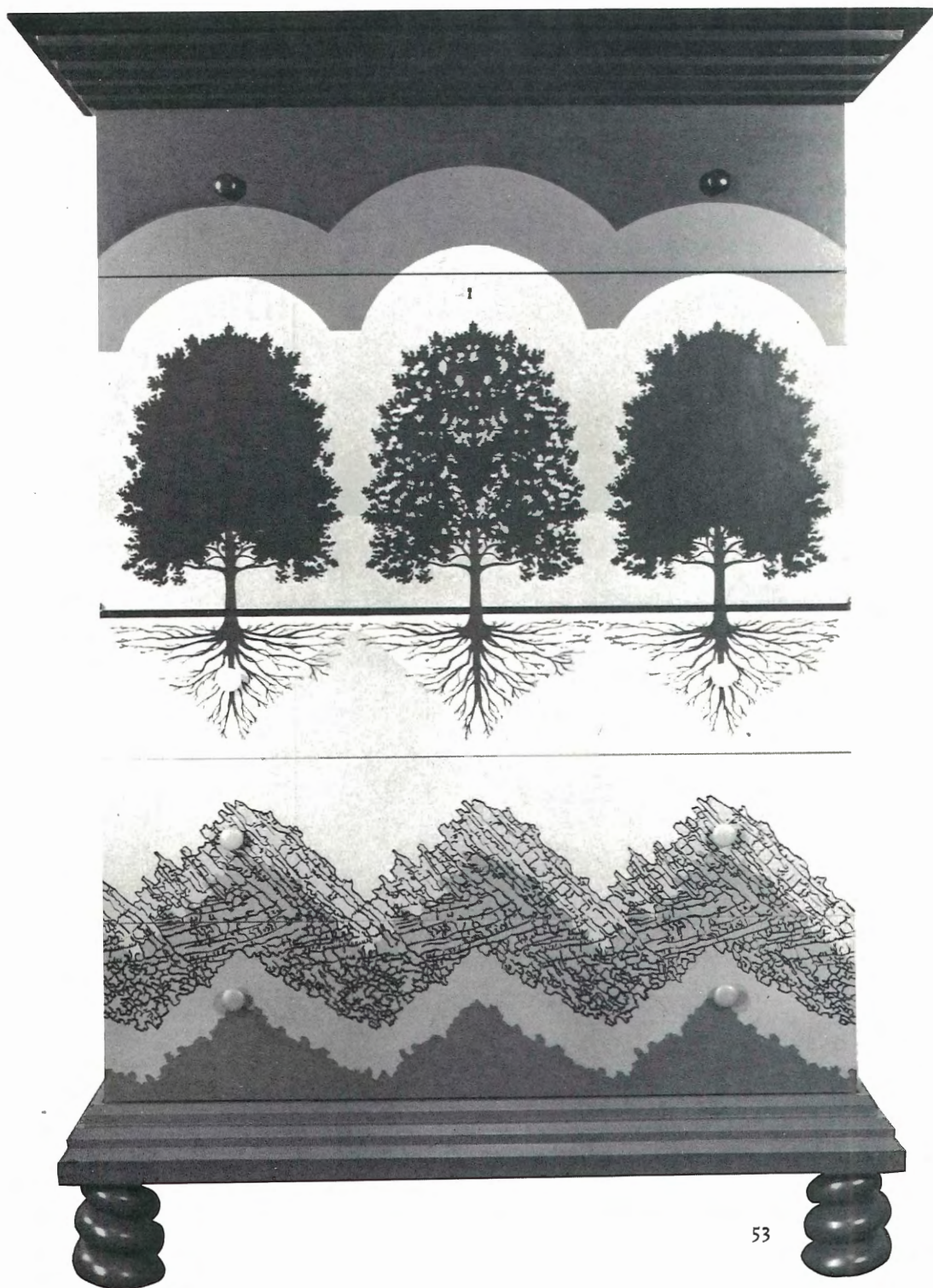
Made by John Stanley, Middleboro, Massachusetts

pine

67 x 48 x 22 (170.1 x 121.9 x 55.9)

Lent by the artist

52



NOTES

1. Dean A. Fales, Jr., *American Painted Furniture 1660-1880* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1972), p. 16. Fales states that most of the earliest furniture still extant was made in Massachusetts. See also Marshall B. Davidson, *The American Heritage History of Colonial Antiques*, ed. Marshall B. Davidson et al. (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1967), p. 15. Davidson comments that little furniture was produced in Virginia, where household furnishings were generally imported from England.
2. Davidson, p. 17.
3. Fales, p. 19.
4. Fales, p. 59, says that japanned furniture "became a quiet rage in many eighteenth century Colonial homes from New Hampshire to South Carolina." See also Davidson, pp. 148-51, and Shirley Spaulding De Voe in *The Ornamented Chair: Its Development in America (1700-1890)*, ed. Zilla Rider Lea (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1960), p. 21. Writing about japanned chairs, De Voe states that despite the scorn increasingly directed toward these imitations of lacquerware during the next century, japanned work "endured until the close of the 19th century."
5. Fales, pp. 60-61.
6. Florence E. Wright in *The Ornamented Chair*, pp. 82-83. Passage pertaining to Lambert Hitchcock is indebted to Wright's discussion of stenciled chairs. See also Fales, pp. 184-85.
7. Marshall B. Davidson, *The American Heritage History of American Antiques from the Revolution to the Civil War*, ed. Marshall B. Davidson et al. (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1968), p. 173.
8. Wright, p. 82.
9. Fales, p. 256.
10. Ibid., p. 283.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 276.
13. Quoted by Fales, p. 276. See also Celia Jackson Otto, *American Furniture of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 160.
14. Otto, p. 160.
15. Ibid., p. 135.
16. Robert Judson Clark, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1876-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 89.
17. Harvey L. Jones, *Mathews: Masterpieces of the California Decorative Style* (Oakland, Calif.: Oakland Museum, 1972), p. 71.

